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James O. Wilburn

WHY WE SING IN THE WORSHIP AND DO NOT PLAY

BY L. S. WHITE

The Churches of Christ are composed of a large number of intelligent and consecrated men and women. New people are being added to them daily. These churches sing in all the services, but do not have instrumental music at any time. Why is this? Is it to satisfy some peculiar notion? Or does the Bible teach us to thus worship God in song? In different parts of the country hundreds of thousands of Christians sing in the public assemblies of the saints; but do not use instrumental music. Is there a reason for it to be done this way? And is that reason a Scriptural one? Several years ago, I saw the division and strife in some of the churches over the question of instrumental music. I determined to study the Bible very carefully on this question for the purpose, first, of learning the truth; and second, to glorify God in living up to this truth and teaching it to others. It has been my pleasure to speak on this question at many places in different states; and wherever I go, the people seem deeply interested in this live question. I call it a "live question" because it is a Scriptural question, and all Scriptural questions are "live questions". As nearly as possible, let us lay aside every idea we ever had on this subject, and come to the

Word of the Lord with a full purpose of learning the truth, for "The truth shall make you free." John 8: 32.

The Lord took Moses on the mountain, and kept him there for some time, giving him full instructions how to build the Tabernacle. When he came down, and began to build, God said to him: "See that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." Heb. 8: 5. For a fine synopsis of the Tabernacle service, read Heb. 9: 1-12. God gave Moses the "pattern", and instructed him to build by it. We all know the use and need of a pattern. And a pattern will be of no benefit unless followed. An architect gets out a plan for a house; but that plan will be of no benefit unless followed in the building of the house. And so it is in the religious realm. Our God has given us the plan, and we must follow his plan. In this sermon, we will measure the Church by God's plan, the Word of the Lord; but will certainly not measure the Word of the Lord by the church. "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. . . . For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure." II Cor. 10: 12-14.

The Tabernacle a Type of the Church.

By all known to me, it is conceded that the Tabernacle is a type of the church. The Tabernacle and all its furnishings are described in the latter part of the book of Exodus. It had only one door of entrance; and in it there were two apartments. In these apartments, there were certain pieces of furniture. The first apartment was called the "Holy Place", and it represented the church. The second apartment was called "The Most Holy Place" or the "Holy of Holies", and was a type of heaven. No one could enter the Tabernacle except the Priests. At the door of the Tabernacle was placed the laver. It contained

water. After the Priest had been properly prepared, he was brought to the laver, and as the crowning act, was bathed in this water, and then admitted into the Tabernacle, where he could perform the service of God. This act represents our being baptized. The Lord would not permit those people to put the laver inside the Tabernacle, bring the Priest into the Tabernacle, and then bathe him; neither will he permit us to change either the action or design of baptism, and make Christians of people; and then baptize them: but it must stay where the Lord has placed it. On the same principle, God would not permit those people to remove any piece of furniture out of the holy place into the most holy place, neither would he permit them to remove any furniture out of the most holy place into the holy place. So, because a thing is done in the church by the directions of the Bible, is no reason that it will be done in heaven; and because we read that certain things are done in heaven, is no reason why we should do them in the church. Neither should a thing be done as worship to God because it is permissible in the home. For example: Bacon and beans are good on the table in a private home, but are not to be used on the Lord's table in the worship of God. If we do things in the church because they are done in heaven, then we will have a Priest, a golden altar, burn incense on that golden altar, and do other things the Lord has not authorized us to do. And here I lay down some principles to govern us in the study of this important question:

I. *The Word of the Lord Our Pattern.*

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Tim. 3: 16, 17. If instrumental music in the worship is a good work, certainly the Word of the Lord will furnish

us the necessary instruction, as it "thoroughly furnishes us unto all good works."

2. *Should Have a Reason for All We Do.*

"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." I Pet. 3: 15. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." I Pet. 4: 11. "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Gal. 1: 8.

3. *We Must Walk By Faith.*

"For we walk by faith, not by sight." II Cor. 5: 7. Before a thing can be done by faith, God must give the instruction for the doing of it. There is only one ⁱⁿ faith that does any good. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Gal. 5: 6.

4. *God Has the Right to Restrict the Membership of His Church, and Say Who Shall Enter It.*

In harmony with this principle, the Lord stands at the door of his church, and by his Word, says who shall enter, and how they shall enter "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Heb. 5: 9. In II Thes. 1: 7-10, we learn that all who do not obey the Gospel will be lost.

5. *God Has Placed Restrictions Around the Worship As Binding As Entrance Into the Church.*

This is the real battle-ground of the instrumental music question. For if God has placed no restrictions around the worship, then people can use instrumental music or anything else thy please; but if he has placed restrictions around the worship, and he has, then we can not use instrumental music in the worship. I give you some

examples of restrictions. In ancient times God designated the tribe of Levi should not have any inheritance in the land of Canaan; and that they should be supported by their brethren. God also designated that the Levites should do a special work of the Lord that others should not do; and it was specially true that only the descendents of Aaron should do the work of the Priests. In Numbers 16th chapter, we learn where Korah, Dathan, and Abiram took this authority to themselves, and did some of the work of the Priests; and because of this, the Lord parted the ground from under them, and they were swallowed up, and also their followers were destroyed. And in Lev. 10: 1, 2, we learn where Nadab and Abihu, real Priests, offered a sacrifice in a different way from what the Lord had instructed them, and were destroyed. God had said the ark was to be removed in a certain way; but David undertook to move the ark in a different way from what the Lord directed; and at least one man lost his life, although David had thirty thousand musicians playing at one time on "all manner of instruments". II Sam. 6: 1-7. Later, David did as the Lord had directed, and removed the ark to the right place. In Numbers 20: 7-12, God told Moses to "Speak" to the rock, and bring forth water, but Moses "Smote" the rock. The water gushed out; and we might decide it made no difference just so he got results. But God would not permit Moses to enter the promised land because he did differently from what the Lord told him. In fact, the Bible tells us how to worship God; and I am pleading that we worship God as he teaches us. "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." John 4: 24. To worship in spirit, is to be honest, sincere, fervent, and devoted. This is all good, but not enough, if we stop here; for it takes two things to make the worship acceptable to God, '*spirit*' and '*truth*'. But what is truth? Thy word is truth. John 17: 17.

But when was singing put into Christian worship? It was put there by Jesus Christ when he instituted the Lord's Supper. "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives." Matt. 26: 30. I would have been just as easy to say they "played", but the Bible says they "sung".

Some Prophecies on Singing and Their Fulfillment.

"Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name." Psa. 18: 49. That this is a prophecy of the way Christians are to sing, the following Scripture shows: "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, for this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." Rom. 15: 9. It would have been just as easy to prophecy of "playing" as of "singing", but the Lord said: "*sing*", and we better do what he said do. In another prophecy, we read: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth. Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing." Isa. 52: 7, 8. By reading Rom. 10: 15, we see this is a prophecy concerning New Testament times, and is now fulfilled by "lifting up the voice"; and there is no stretch of the imagination by which we can make "*voice*" mean a mechanical instrument of music. And the following prophecy is very significant: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." Psa. 22: 22. David said he would praise God "in the midst of the congregation. How was this to be done? The Bible tells us: "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Heb. 2: 12. Thus we see God foretold that "in the midst of the church we are to *sing* praise unto

him." It would have been so easy for the Lord to say "play", but he said "sing"; and we should be delighted to do what the Lord says.

They Sang: And We are to Sing.

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God." Acts 16: 25. It would have been so easy to say "played", but the Bible says they "sang". Better be on the safe side. In regulating Christian worship, Paul said: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." I Cor. 14: 15. In further regulating Christian worship, he says: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Eph. 5: 19. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Col. 3: 16. Much is being said about the word "Psallo", as used in these and other Scriptures, from which we have our English words "sing", "singing" "making melody" and "sing praises". Our God tells us what the *instrument* is on which we are to "make melody", and that instrument is the "*Heart*"; and when God declares that the instrument is the heart, it is a very dangerous thing to say it is a mechanical instrument. Just as when our Saviour said: "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved," he used the word "baptizo", which means to "dip, plunge, submerge, immerse, overwhelm." But the element to be used does not inhere in the word. So the good Lord tells us what element to use, and that is *water*; and we must not use any other element in baptizing. The Lord also settles the matter forever when he tells us the instrument on which we are to "pluck, twitch, twang, vibrate, make melody", is the *heart*. And when God says: "Making mel-

ody in your heart," I will never step in front of the Lord, and say to the people to make the melody on a mechanical instrument. But we are told that we can not "Sing Psalms" without using instrumental music as an accompaniment. Let the Bible inform us: "Is any among you afflicted. Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." Jas. 5: 13. When God says: "Sing psalms," I insist that it does not mean "Play psalms." And here I might say that Job teaches a wonderfully strong lesson on the use of instrumental music, and that was at least fifteen hundred years before Christ: "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. . . . They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Job 21: 7-14.

"But What About David?"

David lived before Christ, and we are to follow Christ; and Christ never used instrumental music in any service he was in; and neither did he ever authorize any one else to use it. But many of those who use instrumental music in the worship, claim that Christ entered into the Temple and took part in the affairs connected therewith, among other things, instrumental music, and did not say one word against these things. This is held up as one of the strongest arguments (?) in favor of instrumental music in the worship. But let us see the facts in the case. The temple built by King Solomon was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar 586 B. C. About 520 B. C., Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem, and rebuilt the Temple. About

twenty years before Christ was born into the world, Herod the Great tore down the Temple, and built a new one; and that was the one in use during the days of Christ on earth: and I deny that the Temple built by Herod the Great ever had a musical instrument in it. This display of words about Christ and the Apostles being accustomed to instrumental music in the Temple is not supported by either the Bible or history. Not one strain of instrumental music in the Temple was ever heard by either Christ or the Apostles. And God says: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion. . . . That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David." Amos 6: 1-5. "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols." Amos 5: 21-23. When God orders people to take away the noise of their songs when accompanied by the viol (instrumental music), I will never ask the people to use instrumental music in the worship. And as God has pronounced a woe on those who "chant to the sound of the viol," I will never step in front of the Lord, and tell the people it is all right to have instrumental music in the worship. Webster says: "*Chant*, To utter with a melodious voice; to sing." This settles the matter with me. I will not "chant"—sing in connection with instrumental music—since God Almighty has placed a woe on those who do it.

When Was Instrumental Music Brought Into the Church Service?

The first church in the world to have an organ was the Catholic Church; and it did not come into the Catholic Church till far in the Seventh Century. The first time the Christian Church ever used an organ, was in St. Louis,

Mo., in 1869; and this was 1836 years after the church was established on earth. The Catholics borrowed instrumental music largely from the heathens; and the Denominations have borrowed it from the Catholics. Adam Clark, one of the greatest Commentators the world has produced, and certainly the greatest the Methodist Church has produced, in commenting on Amos 6: 5, among other things, said: "I farther believe that the use of such instruments of music, in the Christian Church, is *without the sanction, and against the will, of God*;—that they are subversive of the spirit of true devotion; and that they are sinful. If there was a *woe to them who invented* instruments of music, as did David, under the law, is there *no woe, no curse*, to them who invent them, and introduce them into the worship of God in the Christian Church? I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe they were productive of much evil. Music, *as a science*, I esteem and admire; but instruments of music *in the house of God* I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music."

Brief History of Instrumental Music.

"Pope Vitalianus in 658, introduced the organ into the Roman Churches to accompany the singers. Leo II in 682 reformed the singing of the psalms and hymns, accommodating the intonation of them to the manner in which they are sung at the present day." London Encyclopedia, Vol. 15, page 280, article Music "In the Greek Church the organ never came into use." Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, page 1702. I remark here that this is the Greek Catholic Church, and being composed of Greeks who know the Greek language, and consequently the meaning of the word "Psallo", has never permitted the use of instrumental music in their worship. This is indeed

significant. John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian Church, says: "Musical instruments in celebrating the praising of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists therefore, have foolishly borrowed this as well as many other things from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the Apostles is far more pleasing to him. Paul allows us to bless God in the public assembly of the saints, only in a known tongue (I Cor. 14: 16). . . . What shall we then say of chanting, which fills the ears with nothing but an empty sound." Com. on Ps. XXXIII. Alexander Campbell said: "To those who have no real devotion or spirituality in them, and whose animal nature fags under the oppression of church service, I think that instrumental music would be not only a desideratum, but an essential pre-requisite to fire up their souls to even animal devotion. But I presume to all spiritually-minded Christians, such aids would be as a cowbell in a concert."

Conclusion.

On account of the introduction of instrumental music into Christian worship, together with the other things that invariably follow it, a once united and happy brotherhood has been torn asunder. Strife, division, and tears have followed in its wake. The cause of Christ has been weakened. In many cases, instrumental music has been brought into the worship over the pleadings and prayers of faithful and godly men and women; and the church torn to pieces. Even those who use instrumental music in the worship agree that singing is right, and they can acceptably worship God without it. Then, why not leave it out, and have unity? Why think more of instrumental music than the fellowship of a large body of consecrated men and women? Many good people can not worship where

it is used. I have not helped to sing a song for the past twenty years where instrumental music was used. Since learning what the Bible teaches on this question, I can not conscientiously sing where there is instrumental music. The Church of Christ got along in peace and harmony for over eighteen hundred years without instrumental music, and could do so today. I plead with the people who are thus causing division—dividing the body of Christ—to lay aside the unscriptural practice, come back to the Word of the Lord, and let us have unity again! And here, I will say that I do not believe there has been an organ put into any church for the purpose of pleasing the Lord, but to please the people. I want the Lord satisfied. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. 22: 14.

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